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LETTERS  
ON  
THE NICOBAR ISLANDS,  
THEIR NATURAL PRODUCTIONS,

AND

*The Manners, Customs, and Superstitions of the*  
NATIVES;

With an Account of an Attempt made by

THE CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN,  
TO CONVERT THEM TO  
CHRISTIANITY.

Addressed by

THE REV. JOHN GOTTFRIED HAENSEL,  
(*The only surviving Missionary*)

TO

THE REV. C. I. LATROBE.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE EDITOR, NO. 10, NEVIL'S COURT, FETTER LANE,  
BY W. M'DOWALL, PEMBERTON ROW.

AND SOLD BY

HATCHARD, 190, PICCADILLY; L. B. SEELEY, 169, FLEET STREET;  
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1812.

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TO

*William Wilberforce, Esq. M. P.*

*&c. &c. &c.*

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DEAR SIR,

YOUR obliging inquiries concerning the attempt made by the Church of the United Brethren, to establish a mission in the Nicobar Islands, I have not been able hitherto to answer as fully as I wished, the documents in my possession being few and unconnected, and a reference to Crantz's History of the Brethren, p. 504 and 614, furnishing but a short notice of the commencement of that undertaking. The difficulty attending our correspondence with our Brethren on the Continent, has likewise so

much increased, that I cannot expect to be soon supplied with more detailed accounts from our archives; and the continuation of Crantz's History, in which a concise report of the progress of the mission is inserted, is not translated into English. I was glad therefore unexpectedly to meet with an opportunity of conversing with John Gottfried Haensel, a missionary from St. Thomas in the West Indies, who was formerly employed in the Nicobar mission, and resided for seven years in the island of Nancauwery. This worthy veteran has spent eighteen years in the East, and seventeen in the West Indies, and altogether thirty-eight years in the service of the Brethren's missions; yet by God's blessing, after suffering numberless hardships and dangerous illnesses, at the age of sixty-three he remains a most active, cheerful, and zealous labourer in the Lord's vineyard.

IN the course of our frequent conversations on various subjects, relating to the occurrences of his past life, he interspersed so many curious and interesting particulars concerning his residence in the Nicobar Islands; that I could not help requesting him to commit them to writing, as they might occur to his recollection. This he very obligingly consented to do; and though, by my particular desire, he did not study to make out a complete history, the labour and formality of which might have suppressed, in a great degree, the liveliness of his manner, but left the arrangement of the subjects to me; yet I am of opinion, that you will read what he has written with pleasure, and esteem these fragments worthy of preservation. Many of your questions will be pretty satisfactorily answered by them, and I have therefore translated them for your perusal. They exhibit a degree of patience



and perseverance in the prosecution of missionary labours, in hope against hope, such as has hardly been exceeded in our Greenland and North American missions, with the history of which you are acquainted.

THE mission of the United Brethren in the Nicobar Islands, was undertaken in the year 1758. A person of high rank at the court of Denmark, having intimated to the directors of the Brethren's missions, that it would give particular pleasure to the King, if some of their missionaries would settle on the Nicobar Islands, and endeavour to instruct the inhabitants in the principles of the Christian religion; they resolved to comply with his Majesty's wishes.

A COMMERCIAL establishment had been formed on these islands in 1756, when



the name of Frederic's Islands was given to them; but the first attempt miscarried, and almost all the colonists sent thither from Tranquebar, soon died. The Brethren, however, were not discouraged. After some negociation with the Danish Asiatic company, having obtained an edict, granting them necessary privileges to preach the gospel to the heathen, and to maintain their own church-discipline and worship, they agreed to begin the work, and several Brethren offered themselves for this service. The names of the first missionaries were George John Stahlman, Adam Gottlieb Voelcker, and Christopher Butler. They arrived July 2, 1760, at Tranquebar, and were received by the Governor and all the inhabitants, with much cordiality.

As an establishment on the coast of Coromandel, was found indispensably ne-

cessary to support the new mission, they bought a piece of ground, about a mile from Tranquebar, built a house, with out-houses and work-shops, and maintained themselves by their several trades. This settlement was called *The Brethren's Garden*.

A SECOND company followed them in the same year. According to directions given by the Brethren in Europe, they carefully avoided all interference with the worthy Lutheran missionaries residing at Tranquebar, by whose pious exertions many Malabars had been converted to Christianity.

THE Danish East India company, not being able to renew their settlement in the Nicobar islands as soon as was expected, offers were made to the Brethren by the English Governor of Bengal, to



settle on the Ganges; but they resolved to wait with patience for an opportunity to prosecute their first plan, and obtain the original aim of their mission to the East Indies. This presented itself in 1768, when the Danish government formed a new establishment in the Nicobar islands. Six Brethren were immediately ready to go thither. They settled on Nancawery.

IN 1769, several officers of the company, with a party of soldiers and black servants, arrived from Tranquebar, and brought with them a considerable quantity of merchandize. But they died so fast, that in 1771 only two European soldiers, and four Malabar servants survived. This second failure deterred the company from repeating their attempt, and the project of establishing a factory in the



Nicobar islands was abandoned. The four Brethren residing there were charged with the sale of the remaining goods, and experienced no small inconvenience and trouble from this commission.

IN 1773, however, a vessel was sent from Tranquebar, which relieved them, by taking back the articles of trade left on hand, and bringing them the provisions they wanted.

As the means of thus supplying the missionaries with the necessaries of life, by uncertain communications with Tranquebar, were too precarious, the Brethren resolved to venture upon annually chartering a vessel for that purpose. Mr. Holford, an English gentleman, residing at Tranquebar, rendered them herein the most essential service. He joined them

in fitting out a small ship, which arrived in 1775, with provisions, &c. at Nancawery, and returned with the produce of the country; the sale of which, however, by no means repaid the expence attending the outfit. Mr. Holford, nevertheless, did not lose his courage. Another vessel was fitted out, and sailed in 1776, but having missed the entrance into the Nicobar islands, after long combating contrary winds and currents, she was obliged to cast anchor near Junkceylon, where she deposited her cargo. A third vessel had meanwhile set out for Nicobar, but was equally unsuccessful. Thus the difficulties attending the support of the settlement increasing, this and other causes, mentioned in the course of the following letters, occasioned the final abandonment of the mission in 1787.

You will however perceive, that Mr. Haensel expresses an opinion concerning future attempts to preach the gospel to the natives of the Nicobar islands, which is by no means discouraging.

WITH the sincerest esteem and gratitude for the many proofs you have given of your kind notice of the labours of the Church of the United Brethren among heathen nations,

I remain ever,

Dear Sir,

Your most obliged,

and most faithful friend

and servant,

*C. I. Latrobe.*

LONDON, *May* 12, 1812.



LETTERS  
ON  
THE NICOBAR ISLANDS.

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LETTER I.

AS you have desired me to repeat, in writing, the substance of our conversations respecting the Nicobar Islands, and the mission of the Brethren, begun there in 1758, in which I was employed from the year 1779, till the attempt was relinquished in 1787; I will endeavour, as far as my recollection will enable me, to satisfy your wishes.

The Nicobar Islands are situated at the entrance of the Bay of Bengal, in  $8^{\circ}$  N. latitude, and  $94^{\circ} 20''$  E. longitude, north of Sumatra. Nancauwery is one of the southernmost, and forms, with *Comarty*\* to the north, a commodious harbour, sheltered to the eastward by a long, but narrow island,

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\* See Asiatic Researches, Vol. II. 344, III. 292, IV. 132, 328. Rennel's Memoir, p. 40. Comarty is called Sampieri, in Mr. Haensel's MSS. and Sombrero in a French chart.

called *Tricut*, flat, and abounding in cocoa trees; and to the westward, by *Katsoll*, which is larger. Ships may ride here very safely.

On the north-west point of Nancauwery, behind a low hill, and contiguous to the best landing-place, on a sandy beach, lay the missionary-settlement of the United Brethren, called by the natives, *Tripjet*, or the dwelling of friends, where I arrived in January 1779, in company of Brother Wangeman. On our passage hither we were driven by contrary winds to Queda, on the Malay coast. Here we immediately inquired for Captain Light, having often heard at Tranquebar, that he was well disposed towards the Brethren and their missions, of which he had received some account from Dr. Betschler. We were soon conducted to his dwelling, where we met with a most cordial reception. Being here without any other recommendation, his friendship and kindness proved most gratifying and useful to us. Never have I had it in my power to make any returns to this excellent man, for his disinterested favours, but I shall retain a never-ceasing remembrance of them in a thankful heart, and pray the Lord to bless and reward him. His wife was a Malay, and a relation of the King of Queda, a worthy woman, middle aged, of great urbanity of manners, and better



informed than the generality of her nation. Her countenance was pleasing, she appeared friendly and good tempered, and rendered us many kind services, which will not go unrewarded.

Captain Light expressed his great surprise, at the courage, or rather simplicity, with which I committed myself to the crew of a Malay boat. For as we had lost our boat, and the road in which ships come to an anchor off Queda is above two leagues from the shore, we were at a loss how to work into the harbour with our little schooner, without a pilot. A Malay palong passing, I hailed her, and asked the people whether they would take me on shore. They consented, and I went with them. On hearing this, Captain Light observed, that though he was able to speak their language, and accustomed to their manners, he should not venture to trust himself alone with them, on account of their treacherous character. I replied, "that I never thought of being afraid of any one, to whom I had done no harm." This speech he used to quote, but observed, that among these people I might find myself mistaken.

After our vessel had been brought in by Captain Light's good offices, we were detained some time at Queda, which afforded me an opportunity of becoming a little acquainted with the town and the adjacent country. The inhabitants are chiefly Ma-



lays; but the right side of the river is inhabited by Siamese, Chinese, and a few Roman-catholic Christians. The Malays are all Mahometans, a false-hearted, cruel, and murderous race; so much so, that it is hardly safe for a stranger to suffer them to follow him, for fear of being slyly stabbed. When they are obliged to walk before others, they are suspicious and cowardly, and can hardly speak for fear. The frequent murders committed by them are all by a treacherous attack from behind. They consider themselves much better than their neighbours, and very righteous, because they *ought not* to eat pork, or drink strong liquors. But they supply the want of the latter by taking great quantities of opium, which stupifies their senses. I saw one of their principal people, during a conversation with me, put three or four pills of opium, as large as a grey pea, into his mouth in the space of a quarter of an hour. They are exceedingly addicted to the vilest lusts, and have no sense of shame in gratifying their passions. Polygamy is common among them. Yet with all their vices, they like to brag of their having the true faith. The Chinese, though more industrious, are not more virtuous; and as to the so-called Christians, I will not judge them.

About four or five leagues up the river, the King of Queda has his residence, in a mean-looking

town called *Allessaar*. Many of the inhabitants are Chinese, who have here a large temple; the rest are Malays. The royal palace resembles a spacious farm-house and yard, with many low houses attached to it, which contain his haram. His own house is far from being magnificent, and it seemed to me, as if his whole dignity and state consisted merely in the number of his concubines. There is else no appearance of grandeur. I frequently made an excursion to this place.

Being at last enabled to proceed, we set sail for Nancawery. The Captain steered first for Pulo Penang, (now Prince of Wales island) pretending that he wanted fresh water; but he employed his Lascars chiefly to cut rattan\*, a plant used for rigging. We were glad at length to leave the Malay coast, where, except our cordial reception and hospitable entertainment in Captain Light's house, there was nothing that could be called pleasant, but rather our spirits were vexed, and daily mourned over the shocking state of mankind, without Christ and without God in the world.

We found at Nancawery three Missionaries, Liebisck, Heyne, and Blaschke. The latter being very ill, returned to Tranquebar by the vessel

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\* Calamus Rotang. Lin. Miller's Gard. Dictionary.



which brought us hither, and soon departed this life. Not long after his return, Brother Liebisch fell sick and also departed. Our number was therefore reduced to three, and I was soon seized with so violent a fit of the seasoning fever, that my Brethren, expecting my immediate dissolution, commended me in prayer to the Lord, and took a final leave of me. After this transaction, I fell into a swoon, which being mistaken for death, I was removed from the bed, and already laid out as a corpse, when I awoke and inquired what they were doing, and why they wept? They told me, that, supposing me to be quite dead, they were preparing for my burial. My recovery was very slow; and indeed, during my whole residence in Nancauwery, I never regained perfect health.

After the decease of the Brethren Wangeman and Liebisch, I was left alone with Brother Heyne. We were both ill, and suffered the want of many necessaries of life: but the Lord our Saviour did not forsake us; He strengthened our hearts, and comforted us by such a lively sense of His divine presence, that we were frequently filled with heavenly joy, during our daily prayers and meditations. We felt assured, that that God, who suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without His permission, would also care for us his poor children,



This I have frequently and powerfully experienced, insomuch, that after seven years residence in Nancawery, notwithstanding all the pain, trouble, and anxiety I was often subject to, I fall down at His feet with humble thanksgiving, and exclaim: The Lord hath done all things well, and I have lacked no good thing. Blessed be my God and Redeemer! Amen.

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## LETTER II.

THE vessel sent to Nancawery did not arrive till 1781, and brought a very small portion of provisions for our use, and neither wine, nor any other liquors whatever, the crew having expended the greater part of what was destined for us on their long voyage, and during a detention of four months at Queda, on the Malay coast. We were, however, happy to receive Brother Steinman, who was young, lively, and every way qualified for the service, so that we promised ourselves much assistance from him; but in less than a month after his arrival, it pleased the Lord to take him from us by death. You may suppose what we felt on being again left alone, in want of even the most

necessary articles of subsistence. But the Lord yet helped us, gave us from day to day our daily bread, and in many heavy illnesses approved Himself as our best physician. Oh! how many thousand tears have I shed during that period of distress and trouble. I will not affirm that they were *all* of that kind, which I might, with David, pray the Lord “to put into his bottle,” and ask, “are they not in thy book,” for I was not yet fully acquainted with the ways of God with His people, and had not yet a heart wholly resigned to all His dealings. Oftentimes self-will, unbelief, and repining at our hard lot, was mixed with our complaints and cries unto Him. Do not therefore think them so very pure, and deserving of pity as they may seem. Thus much, however, I can truly say, that amidst it all, our Saviour was the object of our hearts’ desire; and He beheld us with longsuffering and compassion.

We were as diligent as our wretched circumstances would admit, in clearing land and planting, to obtain what we wanted for our support; and having only three negroes to cook, wash, and do other jobs, we frequently laboured beyond our strength, and brought upon ourselves various illnesses. But there seemed no help for it. At the same time we exerted ourselves to learn the Nicobar language, and in the best manner possi-



ble endeavoured to explain to the poor natives, the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the way of salvation through a crucified Saviour.

Not till 1783, had we the satisfaction to see the Brethren J. Heinrich, Fleckner, and Raabs arrive to our assistance, in company of the mate of the vessel, with which they set sail from Tranquebar. While they were lying in the roads of Junkceylon, a French privateer came and claimed her as lawful prize, because, on searching her, he found a few old English newspapers in a trunk belonging to Mr. Wilson, an English gentleman on board, who had escaped from Hyder Ali's prison. This was pretence sufficient for a Frenchman to seize upon a neutral Danish vessel, nor could any redress be ever procured, to the great loss of the Mission. After long and vexatious detention, the mate and the three Brethren purchased a Malay prow, for 75 dollars, and stole off in the night; as the Malay prince would not suffer them to go. Thus we received, instead of our expected stock of provisions, only more mouths to feed. However, we rejoiced to see our dear fellow-missionaries, and did what we could for their relief. As the prow was unfit to go to sea without proper sails, those with which they arrived being nothing but old, rotten mats, we worked up our whole stock of linen and sail-



cloth, and even some of our sheets, and were ten days employed in making sails, and fitting her for the voyage. A black sailor was also procured, and the mate, with the Brethren Raabs and Heyne, left us for Tranquebar. I cannot describe my feelings, when I took a final leave of my dear Brother Heyne, with whom I had so long shared weal and woe, lived in true brotherly love and union of spirit, and enjoyed so much of our Lord's help and comfort, in days of perplexity and distress.

The three following years of my stay were spent in fruitless attempts to preach the gospel to the natives, and the arrangements proposed and made by the new-comers, seemed all to fail. But I cannot help observing, that when we speak of the total failure of our endeavours to promote the conversion of the natives, we have cause, in a great degree, to blame ourselves. For my part, I must confess with humble shame, that I soon lost my faith and courage, brotherly love having ceased to prevail amongst us; for how can Missionaries speak, with effect, of the love of Jesus, and its fruits in the heart, when they themselves do not live in the enjoyment of it? It is true, our trials were great, and the prospect, in many respects, most gloomy; but we have seen in other instances, what the Lord can do, by removing

obstacles, and giving strength to His servants, if they are one in spirit, pray and live together in unity, and prefer each other in love. This was too much wanting during the latter part of our abode in the Nicobar islands, and O that all Missionaries would remember, that brotherly love is the most precious jewel in a Mission; and that no sacrifice of one's own opinions and schemes is too great, to maintain it unbroken.

Our external situation became more and more irksome, and we could scarcely procure the means of subsistence. My health had suffered so much by continual sickness, anxiety, and hard labour, (for the greater part of the management of affairs fell upon me), that I was apparently fast approaching my end; at the thoughts of which I rejoiced greatly, delivered my accounts, and all my concerns, into the hands of Brother J. Heinrich, looking forward with longing to be at rest with Jesus. I felt his comfort, pardon, and peace in my soul, and hoped, that every day would be my last. I had running sores on my legs, and a total obstruction, with tormenting pains in my bowels, and expected that mortification would soon take place, and put an end to my misery. Unexpectedly, a Danish vessel arrived in our harbour, on board of which was Brother Sixtus. He was commissioned to examine into the state of the



Mission, and to bring home such as were still alive.

A voyage seeming to offer the only hope for my recovery. I was conveyed on board, apparently in a dying state, and set sail the same day for Queda. During the voyage, the pain in my bowels was excruciating; and the motion of the ship afforded me no relief, insomuch, that I could bear no other posture than lying prostrate on deck. In this situation it occurred to me, that I had once read in Van Swieten's account of his cures, that he had found the plentiful use of honey beneficial in cases of obstruction. As soon, therefore, as we landed, I procured a sufficient quantity, and mixed it plentifully with my food and drink. My only nutriment indeed consisted of rice boiled in water, to which I added an equal quantity of honey, as also to all the water I drank, cold or warm, of which I took plenty, having a constant thirst upon me. Already, on the first day, it operated by sickness at my stomach, and frequent vomitings, which rendered its taste extremely nauseous, and unpleasant. But perceiving that it also relieved my principal complaint, I persevered, and experienced daily more of its salutary, cooling, and healing effects. As there is plenty of honey at Queda, I laid in a large stock for the voyage.



Here I became acquainted with Mr. Scott, an English captain, who informed me that Captain Light was in Bengal, and had lost his wife by death. From hence we returned to Nancawery, where I found that Brother Sixtus had departed this life, ten days after my leaving the island. Brother J. Heinrich accompanied me to Tranquebar, and Fleckner remained alone.

When we arrived at Tranquebar, we represented to the governor, that it was necessary, that the vessel should immediately return for the relief of the Mission, to which he agreed; and Fleckner being re-called, the Brethren J. Heinrich, Rudolphi, and Soerensen, were sent thither in May 1785. The latter soon departed this life, as likewise Fleckner, at Tranquebar. In September, I returned to Nancawery, being commissioned to convey the house belonging to the Imperial settlement on Sombrero (Comarty) to our place, which I accomplished. Our old stone house was turned into a magazine, and the Missionaries obtained a comfortable dwelling, and a sufficient supply of provisions, and other necessaries. But as to any success in making the natives acquainted with the gospel, all our exertions seemed in vain.

After my return to Tranquebar, in 1786, Brother Rudolphi left Nicobar, and arrived, after a long and tedious voyage, at Tranquebar, in 1787.

Not long after, Brother J. Heinrich departed this life, and Brother Kragh remained alone.

The loss of so many valuable men, the total failure of the object of the Mission, and the want of proper Brethren, willing to devote themselves to so hopeless a cause, at length prevailed, and it was resolved to give up the Mission. I was again deputed to go to Nancauwery, to fetch Brother Kragh, and all effects belonging to the Mission, and to deliver up the premises to the Governor, who, on our representation of the impracticability of our supporting the Mission any longer, had consented to send a lieutenant, a corporal, and six privates, to take possession. I accompanied these people, and delivered to them every thing I could not carry away.

Words cannot express the painful sensations which crowded into my mind, while I was thus executing the task committed to me, and making a final conclusion of the labours of the Brethren in the Nicobar Islands. I remembered the numberless prayers, tears, and sighs offered up by so many servants of Jesus, and by our congregations in Europe, for the conversion of the poor heathen here; and when I beheld our burying-ground, where eleven of my Brethren had their resting-place, as seed sown in a barren land, I burst into tears, and exclaimed: Surely all this cannot have



been done in vain! Often did I visit this place, and sat down and wept at their graves.

My last farewell with the inhabitants, who had flocked to me from all the circumjacent islands, was very affecting. They wept and howled for grief, and begged that the Brethren might soon return to them. We always enjoyed their esteem and love, and they do not deserve to be classed with their ferocious neighbours, the Malays; being, in general, kind and gentle in their dispositions, except when roused by jealousy, or other provocations; when their uncontrouled passions will lead them into excesses, as some of the Danish soldiers experienced. We always found them ready to serve us.

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### LETTER III.

I PROCEED to answer the questions you have put to me, and to give you some short account of the appearance of the country in the Nicobar Islands, and the customs of the inhabitants.

The most of these islands are hilly, and some of the mountains of considerable height: but Tricut, Tafouin, and Kar Nicobar, are flat, and covered



with forests of cocoa trees. The other islands have likewise a large proportion of cocoa and areca palms, and an immense quantity of timber trees of various kinds, some of them of enormous size. All the vallies and sides of the hills, to a considerable height, are thickly covered with them, inso-much, that the light of the sun has not been able for ages to penetrate through their foliage. They are in many places so closely interwoven with immense quantities of rattan and bush-rope, that they appear as it were spun together; and it is almost perfectly dark in the woods. Most of the plants and trees bear fruit, which falls down and rots. All these circumstances contribute to render the climate very unhealthy, the free current of air being wholly impeded; even the natives experience their baneful effects, but, to a European constitution, they are of the most dangerous nature.

I am no botanist, and can therefore give you but little information concerning the different species of trees, shrubs, and plants, which seem to thrive here in such luxurious abundance; but will only add, that that most useful of all trees, the cocoa, is of very easy growth, and thrives best on the sea coast, where its roots and stem are reached by the flood-tide. The nut, falling into the sand, is soon covered by it, and springs up in great

strength. I have planted many, and enjoyed the fruit after five years. When the nuts are ripe, you hang them about the house: in a short time they shoot out sprigs and branches, and when these are about a yard long, you may put them into the ground, where they continue to vegetate rapidly.

Another most beautiful and valuable tree is the Mango, the fruit of which is extremely useful, both for eating and medicinal purposes. The eatable part is inclosed in a shell, which lies in a thick, pulpy rind, Its taste is spicy, very grateful, betwixt sour and sweet, and so wholesome, that there is hardly any fear of eating too plentifully of it. The shell is bitter and astringent, and the Nicobar doctors, or sorcerers, administer a decoction of it against fevers and agues, to which they, as well as strangers, are much subject.

There is also a vast variety of roots, fruits, and herbs, with the medicinal virtues of which the sorcerers are well acquainted. They are, no doubt, noticed by various authors, but I am not able to describe them.

As to the beasts and reptiles existing in these islands, I shall only mention what has come under my own observation, and remains in my recollection. There are no wild beasts here, such as tygers and leopards, as on the coast of Coromandel. Monkies are found in the southernmost



islands, Sambelong, Tavap, and Katsoll. In some others are large herds of buffaloes and other cattle, originally brought thither by the Danes, but which have run wild in the woods, since the abandonment of the colony. They have increased prodigiously; and as the upper regions of the mountains are covered with vast quantities of fine grass, they find food in abundance, and grow to a large size, especially the buffaloes. These are always seen in herds, and I never ventured to shoot any, though I longed to procure some of their flesh for our use. Dogs and swine are found in all the islands.

Serpents are numerous in some places, but they are far less abundant and venomous, than on the coast of Coromandel. The chief cause of this difference I am apt to ascribe to a custom, prevalent among the natives, of setting the long grass on the mountains on fire, two or three times a-year. As these reptiles like to lay their eggs in the grass, great quantities of them are thus destroyed. One kind of serpent struck me here as a singular species; it is of a green colour, has a broad head and mouth like a frog, very red eyes, and its bite is so venomous, that I saw a woman die within half an hour after receiving the wound. She had climbed a high tree in search of fruit, and not observing the animal among the branches, was sud-



denly bitten in the arm. Being well aware of the danger, she immediately descended, but, on reaching the ground, reeled to and fro like one in a state of intoxication. The people brought her immediately to me; and while I was applying blisters and other means for extracting the poison, she died under my hands.

I saw but few scorpions, but among them an unusually large species, of a red colour, said to be extremely venomous. They were lying in a boggy place, and I had no means of taking them.

One of the most formidable animals with which these islands abound, is the crocodile, or alligator. Kar Nicobar is overrun with them, as are all the other Nicobar islands, which have fresh-water lakes and streams. They are of two kinds, the black kayman, and the proper crocodile. The latter is said never to attack live creatures, but to devour only carrion, and is therefore not considered dangerous. Of the correctness of this opinion I had once ocular proof. I was walking at Queda along the coast, and looking at a number of children swimming and sporting in the water. On a sudden, I observed a large crocodile proceed towards them from a creek. Terrified at the idea of the danger they were exposed to, I screamed out, and made signs to some Chinese to go to their assistance, but they laughed me to scorn as an

ignorant stranger. I really afterwards saw the monster playing about among them, while the children diverted themselves by pretending to attack him and drive him away. The kayman is less in size, and very fierce, seizing upon every creature that has life, but he cannot lift anything from the ground, as the lower jaw projects.

The bats of Nicobar are of a gigantic size; I have seen some, whose outstretched wings measured from five to six feet across the back, the body being the size of a common cat. They are of two kinds; the head of one somewhat resembling a dog, and that of the other a cat; the former making a barking, and the latter a mewling noise, when on the wing. I never saw more than one at a time. They appear hideous, and in their solitary flight resemble a cloak in motion, chiefly and awkwardly perching upon the mango tree, the fruit of which they eat, breaking down the smaller branches, till they light upon such as are able to bear their weight.

Of birds, I shall only notice one, called by some the Nicobar swallow\*, but I will not venture to determine its generic character. It is the builder of those eatable nests, which constitute one of the luxuries of an Indian banquet. These birds are

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\* *Hirundo edulis*. Linn. Syst. Nat.



called *Hinlene* by the natives, and build in fissures and cavities of rocks, especially in such as open to the south. In the latter, the finest and whitest nests are found, and I have sometimes gathered fifty pound weight of them, on one excursion for that purpose. They are small, and shaped like swallows' nests. If they are perfect, 72 of them go to a *catty*, or  $1\frac{3}{4}$  pounds. The best sale for them is in China. After the most diligent investigation, I was never able fully to discover of what substance they are made, nor do any of the opinions of naturalists, with which I have become acquainted, appear satisfactory to me, neither have the authors alluded to ever seen the birds. They have remarkably short legs, and are unable to rise, if they once fall or settle on the ground. I caught many in this state, and after examining them, threw them up into the air, when they immediately flew away; they cannot therefore, as some suppose, obtain their materials on the coast, or from rocks in the sea. My opinion is, that the nests are made of the gum of a peculiar tree, called by some the Nicobar cedar, and growing in great abundance in all the southern islands. Its wood is hard, black, and very heavy. From December to May, it is covered with blossom, and bears a fruit somewhat resembling a cedar or pine-apple, but more like a large berry



full of eyes or pustules, discharging a gum or resinous fluid. About these trees, when in bloom or bearing fruit, I have seen innumerable flocks of these little birds, flying and fluttering like bees round a tree or shrub in full flower, and am of opinion, that they there gather the materials for their nests. I relate the fact, having often watched them with great attention, but will not venture to affirm, that I have made a full discovery. I observed before, that these birds dwell in cavities of rocks, like bees in a hive, flying in and out, and building their nests close together, like martins or swallows. The hen constructs a neat, large, well-shaped nest, calculated for laying and hatching her eggs, and the cock contrives to fix another, smaller and rather more clumsy, close to his mate: for they are not only built for the purpose of laying eggs, but for resting-places, whence they may take wing. If they are robbed of them, they immediately fall to work to build others, and being remarkably active, are able to finish enough in a day to support the weight of their bodies, though they require about three weeks to complete a nest. During the north-east trade wind, they are all alive and fly about briskly, but as soon as the wind comes round to the south-west, they sit or lie in their nests in a state of stupor, and show animation only by a kind of tremulous mo-

tion over their whole body. I have sometimes taken one out of his nest in this state, and laid him on the palm of my hand, when I observed no sign of life about him but this trembling, and on returning him to his place, could hardly prevent him from falling on one side. If their nests were taken away at that season, the poor birds must inevitably perish\*.

I did not perceive any great variety of birds in these islands; but wild pigeons and parrots are numerous.

As to fishes, the sea abounds with various descriptions, but my attention was principally directed to shell-fish, which are found in great abundance and beauty on most of the islands, the Mission being in part supported by collections of these and other natural curiosities, made by me and other Brethren, whose time and disposition allowed of it. It became at one time peculiarly my business, and though I possessed no previous knowledge of these things, and would not venture to determine upon a proper classification of the various natural productions which I collected, both on the coast of Coromandel and in the Ni-

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\* See Fontana's Account of these Birds. Asiatic Researches, Vol. III. p. 292.



cobar islands, yet constant practice and experience gave me by degrees sufficient skill to distinguish what was really worthy the attention of naturalists. I had moreover the satisfaction to perceive the blessing of God resting upon these exertions, by which a considerable part of the heavy expences of the Mission were defrayed, there having been at that time a great demand for productions of this kind in England, Holland, Denmark, and other parts of Europe.

On my frequent excursions along the sea coast, it sometimes happened that I was benighted, and could not, with convenience, return to our dwelling; but I was never at a loss for a bed. The greater part of the beach consists of a remarkably fine white sand, which above highwater-mark is perfectly clean and dry. Into this I dug with ease a hole large enough to contain my body, forming a mound as a pillow for my head; I then lay down, and by collecting the sand over me, buried myself in it up to the neck. My faithful dog always lay across my body, ready to give the alarm, in case of disturbance from any quarter. However, I was under no apprehension from wild animals. Crocodiles and kaymans never haunt the open coast, but keep in creeks and lagoons, and there are no ravenous beasts on the island. The only annoyance I suffered was from the noc-



turnal perambulations of an immense variety of crabs of all sizes, the grating noise of whose armour would sometimes keep me awake. But they were well watched by my dog; and if any one ventured to approach, he was sure to be suddenly siezed, and thrown to a more respectful distance; or if a crab of more tremendous appearance deterred the dog from exposing his nose to its claws, he would bark and frighten it away, by which, however, I was often more seriously alarmed than the occasion required. Many a comfortable night's rest have I had in these sepulchral dormitories, when the nights were clear and dry.

But before I dismiss this subject I cannot conclude my letter, without observing, that on the continent, as well as in some of the other East Indian islands, it would be hazardous in the extreme to expose oneself in this manner, during the night, on account of the number of wild beasts, of various descriptions, with which they abound. I feel truly thankful to God, that He preserved me, on my many journies, from all harm; nor can I speak of having ever been in much danger. Yet one instance of His merciful preservation of my life, I must be permitted to add.

On one of my voyages either to or from Queda, (for I have forgotten the precise time) a Danish ship hailed us, and approaching incautiously, ran

foul of our stern, and broke our flag-staff. We therefore put into a creek, and some of our men landed near a wood, to cut down a tree to make a new one. Hoping to be able to procure some fresh meat for supper, I accompanied them, armed with a double-barrelled gun. While they were at their work, I walked on the outside of the wood, eagerly looking for some game, and soon discovered, among the high grass, an object, which, by its motions, I mistook for the back of a hare. I took aim, and was just going to fire, when the animal rose up, and proved to be a tyger, of which only the top of the head had been visible. My arm involuntarily sunk down; I stood motionless with horror, expecting that the creature would immediately make a spring at me, and gave myself up for lost; but, by God's providence watching over me, the beast seemed as much alarmed as I was, and after staring at me for a few moments, turned slowly about, and began to creep away, like a frightened cat, with his belly close to the ground; then, gradually quickening his pace, fled with precipitation into a distant part of the wood. It was some time before I recovered presence of mind sufficient to trace back my steps towards the beach, for I felt my very heart tremble within me. As I approached the water, there was a piece of jungle, or low thicket before



me, and I was turning to the left, to pass round by the side opposite the boat, thinking that I might yet find some game, when, seeing the men labouring hard to drag the tree they had felled, towards the water, I altered my course, and went to their assistance. No sooner had I entered the boat, than I discovered on that side of the jungle, to which I was first going, close to the beach, a large kayman, watching our motions, whom I should certainly have met, had I gone round by the way I intended. Thankful as I now felt for this second preservation of my life, I could not help discharging my piece at the animal's head, and by the sudden plunge he made into the water, and the appearance of blood on the surface, as he was swimming towards the opposite shore, it seemed that one or both of the shots had penetrated his eye or throat. We saw him reach the shore, and crawl through the mud into the jungle.

Part of the flesh of the crocodile or kayman is good and wholesome, when well cooked. It tastes somewhat like pork, for which I took it, and ate it with much relish, when I first came to Nancawery; till, on inquiry, finding it to be the flesh of a beast so disgusting and horrible in its appearance and habits, I felt a loathing, which I could never overcome; but it is eaten by both natives and Europeans.



## LETTER IV.

SINCE you have expressed satisfaction with my imperfect account of some of the natural productions of the Nicobar islands, and desire me to continue the subject, I regret that I cannot gratify you with a sight of the lists I kept, of the different kinds of serpents, crabs, spiders, and other creatures, which I caught everywhere, either to stuff, put into spirits, or otherwise prepare for my customers. At our garden near Tranquebar, I had a shop or work-room purposely constructed for these operations, and kept sometimes two or three Malabar boys at work to help me. Of serpents and snakes I had a list of upwards of eighty different species, from the size of a common worm, to sixteen and twenty feet long; of crabs, upwards of ninety; and of spiders, more than forty. Whether I went into the woods, on the beach, by land, or by sea, I was accustomed to look about, and examine every object I saw, and acquired great facility in catching some of the most dangerous animals, without harm to myself. Far from being afraid of serpents, I went out purposely to discover their haunts, in the jungle or among the rocks, defending my legs with a pair of strong boots; and

if I could prevent their slipping off into their holes, and irritate them so as to make them attempt to strike me, my work was done. For a serpent thus situated, will coil himself up, and instantaneously darting forward his head, strike and bite whatever comes in his way. I then presented my hat, which the animal violently seized with his fangs; when, instantly snatching it away, I seldom failed to extract them by the sudden jerk; for, being curved, they cannot be readily withdrawn, and sitting but loosely in the gums, are easily disengaged. Being thus rendered in a great degree harmless, I pinned their heads down, and tied them up. Great care, however, is required, not to suffer yourself to be lacerated by their teeth, or in any other way, while preparing their heads, and refixing the fangs; for if a wound is thus inflicted, even long after their death, the consequences are dreadful, and often fatal, of which I might relate many singular instances, which came immediately under my observation.

There is among them a short serpent, found in the neighbourhood of Tranquebar, and called by us, the *Split-snake*, (*die Spalt-schlange*). It is black, with a white streak down its back, dividing the body longitudinally. Its bite is extremely venomous; and being slender, it can insinuate itself into a very small hole or cranny, and will



enter rooms and closets, in quest of food. There was a door in a dark part of my work-room, with a large clumsy lock to it; and one evening, as I was attempting to open it, having to pass that way, I felt a sudden prick in my finger, and at the same time a violent electrical shock, as if I were split asunder. Not thinking of a serpent, I first imagined, that my Malabar boys had, in their play, wound some wire about the handle, by which I had been hurt, and asked them sharply, what mischief they had done to the door. They denied, that they had meddled with it, and I made a second attempt, when I was attacked still more violently, and perceived the blood trickling down my finger. I then returned into my room, sucking the wound, till I could draw no more blood. I applied some spirits of turpentine to it, put on a bandage, and being much hurried that evening with other business, made no farther inquiry about it. However, in the night it swelled, and was very painful. In the morning, I went again into the work-room, when I thought I perceived an unpleasant, musky smell. On approaching the before-mentioned door, the stench was intolerable. I again asked the boys, what nasty thing they had brought into the room, for they were always at play; but they again denied any knowledge of the cause of the nuisance. A candle was



brought, and I now beheld the origin of all the mischief. About six inches length of the head and body of a young split-snake hung out of the key-hole, quite dead; and on taking off the lock, I found the creature twisted into it, and so much wounded by the turn of the bolt, in attempting to open the door, that it had died in consequence. It had intended to enter the room through the key-hole, when I thus accidentally stopped its progress, and got bitten; and considering the deadly poison this serpent always infuses into the wound inflicted, I felt very thankful to God, my Preserver, that, by sucking the infected blood out of my finger in time, and applying a proper remedy, though ignorant of the cause of the wound, my life was not endangered. I have heard and believe, that the bite of every serpent is accompanied, more or less, by a sensation similar to an electrical shock, as the poison seems almost instantaneously to affect the whole mass of blood. We considered also the name of split-snake given to this animal, not so much as descriptive of its split appearance, as of the singular sensation its bite occasions, and which I then experienced.

Of other remarkable serpents I will only quote, the *Whip-snake*, which is green, from four to six feet long, slender, and springs horizontally, from tree to tree, whence it is also called the

*Flying-snake.* The species, known by the name of the *Double-headed-snake*, has not two heads, but is equally thick before and behind; and, like some caterpillars, furnished with a kind of protuberance at its tail, which, to a superficial observer, may pass for another head. They are of a red colour, sluggish, and resemble a long sausage. The *Wall-snake* climbs a wall with great agility, and is small and spotted. The bite of all these serpents is attended with great danger; indeed I believe there is not one of this class of animals that is not more or less venomous, though some in a very slight, and almost imperceptible degree. Their poison principally affects the blood, and is not hurtful to a sound skin. Yet I hardly ever cased one of the larger serpents for stuffing, but I turned sick with the extraordinary, musky, and loathsome smell of their flesh, though ever so fresh.

But I have detained you already too long with this unsavoury subject, and will, in my next, proceed to answer your inquiries concerning the habits and customs of the natives of the Nicobar islands.



## LETTER V.

THE natives of these islands are a free people, perfectly independent, but have a captain in every village. There are, indeed, several who claim the rank of captain, as being more sensible and clever than their neighbours, but only one of the number is considered as the *Omjah karru*, or the great master of the house. Yet no one is bound to obey him, for all of them, male and female, consider themselves under no controul whatever; and the captain must take care, that he does not offend, by pretending to command. He is sure to be disobeyed, unless they are pleased to listen to friendly representation. All the preference given him, consists in this; that when a ship arrives, he is allowed to go first on board, and to make the bargain, if they have any thing to barter. They are commonly good-natured men, disposed to make and preserve peace among the common people. In every other respect they live and act like the rest, get drunk, commit fornication, and, when there is, as they say, a necessity for it, murder; and are equally lazy and unclean. But they can use their tongues more glibly than their neighbours.

Their houses are generally spacious, and built upon pillars, six or more feet from the ground, resembling those of the Malays, but round, not square, like the latter. The inhabitants ascend by a ladder, which they can draw up after them. The house has only one room, but generally contains more than one family. Parents and children, guests, young and old of every description, pig here together, lying naked on the floor, with nothing but a *hetfat*, the leaf of a species of palm, under them, in lieu of a mattrass, and very few have any covering. The furniture of such a house consists in a few pots, made by the women, some highly polished cocoa-nut dishes, to hold water, some hatchets, a sabre or two, a few sailor's knives, and a good many spears. A family generally possesses two or three palongs, or boats.

Their chief food is melory bread, made of the fruit of a kind of palm-tree\*, which is very palatable; yams, several other good roots, and great plenty of fruit from various trees and shrubs; all which grow in great abundance. Of pigs and common fowls they have a vast profusion. These are fed with cocoa-nuts, and their flesh is remark-

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\* A species of Pandanus. See Asiatic Researches, Vol. III. p. 292.



ably good. The sea furnishes them with various kinds of fishes, and an abundance of crabs and other shell-fish, so that they may easily enough serve their god, which is their belly.

The clothing of the men consists of a narrow piece of cloth, about three yards long. This they wrap twice round their waist, then passing it between their legs, and through the girth behind, leave the end of it to drag after them\*. The women wear a piece of cloth, commonly of a blue colour, about a foot wide, fastened round their waist, so as to hang down like an apron, reaching not quite to their knees. They pride themselves upon their fine skin, which indeed they keep very clean, and do not in general use any paint. Both sexes live from their infancy without any restraint, and commit every kind of abomination, often to the utter ruin of their health and constitutions, in very early life. In general they do not live regularly in the married state, till they are past their prime; though I have known some who had married early, remain faithful to each other, and keep their families in good order.

As savages, they may be justly esteemed a

\* Hence the fabulous stories of men with tails, related by Kioping, a Swedish navigator.

good-natured race, being always ready to do a kind action, to their friends; of which I will relate one instance. We used to buy of them what we wanted, and pay with tobacco, the current medium. Even when they had nothing to sell, they would come and fetch their portion of tobacco, which we never refused them, as long as we had any, till, by the non-arrival of the ship, we were left entirely without it. We therefore told the captain of the village, that, as we had no more tobacco, the people need not bring us any more provisions, for we had nothing to give in exchange. The captain did as we desired, yet, on the very next day, we were supplied more plentifully than ever, with the things we wanted. They would not even wait for pay, but hung up their fruit and meat about the house, and went away. We called after them and told them how we were situated. Their answer was: "When you had  
 " plenty of tobacco, you gave us as much as you  
 " could spare; now, though you have got no more  
 " of it, we have provisions enough, and you shall  
 " have as much as you want, as long as we have  
 " any, till you get more tobacco." This promise they most faithfully performed. Such kindness we did not expect from such people; but they always showed great affection for us.

As to religion, they are in a state of deplorable



ignorance. Their notions of a Divine Being seem most oddly perplexed, insomuch that it is difficult to make out any thing among them like a fixed opinion of His existence and attributes, nor do they seem to possess any curiosity to know more about Him.

But they are not professed idolaters, like most of the other oriental nations. They have not even a word in their language to express their idea of God. They use the word *Knallen* when they speak of Him, but it only signifies, “above, on high:” for instance, they say, *Knallen maade*, “on the hill;” *Knallen uniga*, “on the top of the tree;” *Knallen gamalee*, “on the surface of the sea;” speaking of something swimming. However, they believe that this “unknown God” is good, and will not hurt them; but wherein His goodness consists, they neither have, nor seem to wish to have, any understanding, nor ever trouble themselves about Him. Therefore, when we endeavoured, as well as we could, to explain to them the goodness of God, in pitying the lost condition of man, and providing the means of our redemption; and spoke to them of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and of what He has done and suffered to purchase for us salvation, they heard us indeed with astonishment and silent submission; but that they should be at all interested in it, and become virtuous and happy

if they believed and turned to Him, and after this life enter into everlasting bliss by His merits, was more than they could possibly comprehend. When we told them, that we were come hither for no other purpose, but to make them acquainted with their Creator and Redeemer, and to bring them the glad tidings of salvation; and begged them only to take it to heart, and reflect upon what we thus made known to them in the name of God, they laughed at us. They observed, that they could not believe that the sufferings of one man could atone for the sins of another; and that therefore, if they were wicked, what we told them of a crucified Saviour would not help them: but they insisted, that they were good by nature, and never did any thing wrong, as we well knew. When we replied, that we knew, that they had but lately murdered some people, and afterwards abused the dead bodies, each thrusting his spear into them, mutilating them in the most wanton manner, and at last cutting them to pieces, and asked them, whether this was a proof of their natural goodness, their answer was: "That you do not understand, those were people not fit to live, they were *Gomoy*, "cannibals!"



## LETTER VI.

THE inhabitants of the Nicobar islands believe, that all dangerous diseases proceed from the devil, who is nevertheless under the controul of their sorcerers, or *Paters*\*. If, therefore, these men cannot cure a disorder by their tricks and incantments, by which they pretend to catch the devil and drive him off the place, then they are sure, that he has entered into some man or woman, sitting in his or her house, and by witchcraft, sucking all the power of healing out of the patient's body. The sorcerer then proceeds to discover the witch, and finds no difficulty in fixing upon some one he hates. The word of such a wise man is, of course, taken by all for the voice of truth, and the poor person accused is murdered without further inquiry. Murders of this kind occurred but seldom in our neighbourhood, but were said to be more frequent in some of the other islands. We told them, that the devil everywhere proved himself the father of lies, and

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\* An appellation borrowed from the Portuguese Missionaries.

a murderer from the beginning; and, till they turned to the true God, they were Satan's slaves, and his works they must do. They seem indeed to be continually engaged with him, whenever they profess to perform any religious rite. They even ascribe the creation of the world to the *Eewee*, or wicked agent. If they do any thing wrong, or commit any atrocious crime, and are reproved for it, they immediately answer: "It was not me, it was the devil that did it." If you convince them, that they did it themselves, and with their own hands, their usual phrase is, "The *Eewee* did not make me perfect, or better;" and therefore they cannot help sometimes doing what is wrong. They speak of a great many sorts of devils, but all malicious, and disposed to hurt them, if they had not such great and powerful paters among them, who had a superior power, and could catch, and bring them into subjection. It is not difficult for the sorcerers thus to impose upon the poor ignorant people, for they really do possess superior cunning, and astonishing dexterity, being the most expert jugglers on earth. Every one who has visited the East Indies, well knows, with what unaccountable exhibitions and slight of hand tricks the jugglers endeavour to amuse the people; but in the Nico-



bar islands, these arts being applied to what they consider as religious exercises, the deception is so great, that I have myself often stood astonished, being unable to account for what I saw.

I went once purposely into a house, where a sorcerer was about to perform as doctor, and to cure a woman, who lay very ill. I was determined to watch him as narrowly as possible. Both doctor and patient were stark naked. After a series of most horrible grimaces, the sorcerer produced a very large yam, which he held up, pretending that he had *limpt* it, (for thus they call this species of legerdemain), out of the body of the woman, and that it had been, by witchcraft, the cause of her disorder. When he entered, I particularly noticed that he had nothing in his hands, or about him, nor did there appear any possibility of a substance of that size being concealed in the empty room. At another time, I saw a sorcerer, under similar circumstances, on a sudden exhibit three large stones, which he pretended to have extracted from the patient's body. To the first of these patients, he afterwards administered a decoction of herbs, and she recovered. The cure was probably owing to his skill in preparing the potion, but was of course ascribed to the incantation, and the seizure of the enchanted yam.

After I had resided five years in the island, my

legs began to inflame and swell to a prodigious size\*. A suppuration took place, and till the discharge commenced, I suffered excruciating pain. During this dreadful illness, several paters called upon me, and in the most friendly manner, expressed their pity, offering me their assistance, and assuring me, that if I would submit to their mode of cure, I should soon recover. At last I thought, that as their skill in various medicinal arts, and their knowledge of drugs was very great, I would suffer one of them, called Philip, who always attended us as language-master, to try what he could do for me, on condition, that he should omit all superstitious ceremonies. He agreed, and immediately putting on the most solemn and significant expression of face, worthy of so eminent a practitioner, began to paw me all over, varying his features with every motion of his hand, so that, notwithstanding the pain I felt, I could not refrain from bursting into laughter at his grimaces, which he could not possibly avoid, though bargained to be omitted. At length, the preamble concluded, he began his work, first by stroking my legs, from the knees downwards, with the

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\* A disorder known in India by the name of the Cochin leg. Asiatic Researches, Vol. III.



palm of his hand, muttering all the while, and then by applying his mouth, and sucking the parts affected, accompanying the operation by a most strange kind of purring or grunting. Thus far his practice seemed to do good, and I felt relief, when, rising on a sudden, he produced a potsherd, which he exhibited to the company, as having *limpt* it out of my leg, saying that he should soon bring forth more pieces. I cried out, "Stop  
 " there, you deceiver, do you pretend that my body  
 " is full of potsherds; that broken piece in your  
 " hand, you drew out of your own mouth. Open  
 " it directly, and let us have the rest." He stood confounded, and soon sneaked out of the house, laughed at by all his former admirers, nor did he call upon me again, till about a fortnight after.

As it sometimes happened, that when the skill of the sorcerers proved ineffective, a missionary had administered some simple medicine, which, by God's blessing, had the desired effect, they looked upon us, as the first of paters, though our *medicines* consisted in nothing but a little *magnesia*, spirits of nitre, and a few simples. But what *astonished* them most, was this, that we could inform them before-hand, by means of a perpetual almanack, that an eclipse of the sun or moon would take place on the very day when it happened. Their notion of the cause of an eclipse is the most

preposterous and ridiculous, that ever entered into the head, even of an heathen. They say, that the devil is come to devour the sun or moon, and falls to work to gnaw off the edge; that therefore it is necessary he should be driven away; consequently all the sorcerers or paters assemble, and amidst singular and hideous grimaces, throw up their spears towards the luminary attacked, all the villagers sounding their gonggongs with the greatest violence, to frighten away the voracious invader. After some time, their efforts succeed, and he must betake himself to flight, without effecting his purpose. Though we endeavoured, in every possible way, to explain to them how an eclipse was occasioned, and they seemed in some degree to comprehend it, they only declared us to be the greatest paters that had ever been on the island, but ascribed the deliverance of the sun or moon from the fangs of the devil, solely to the skill and power of their sorcerers, and all we could say to prevail upon them, for once to be quiet, and observe how the luminary would regain its former appearance, by those means which God the Creator Himself had ordained, was in vain.

The expulsion of the devil from a sick person or family, is a ceremony as singular as it is silly, but as I have frequently been a spectator of this farcical performance, a description of it may not



be uninteresting to you. I have before observed, that if their medicines, (many of which are very powerful), or, as they will have it, their incantations, are of no avail, they then ascribe the illness to the immediate agency of the infernal spirit, who must be subdued and caught. The pater, previous to the commencement of his operations, summons all the young men in the village, to assist him in constructing a small raft, of light wood. Three poles are fixed upon it, to represent masts, and some bamboos laid across like oars. The masts are hung with young white cocoa-leaves. This toy, which they call *Hanmai*, they place between two palongs, each rowed by a crew of stout young men, with a piece of rattan, as a towing-rope, fixed to it. Every rower carries five spears, besides his oar. They now wait with great eagerness for the pater's further orders. He has meanwhile begun his work, which he finds either hard or easy of performance, according as the patients are rich or poor. He is stark naked, and painted all over with various colours, making as terrific an appearance as possible, to frighten the devil, and indeed it is enough to terrify any man, to see him brandishing a short clumsy bludgeon, which he holds up with both hands, and dancing in the most furious manner. He accompanies his gesticulations with the most hor-

rible yells and howlings, and at length is fortunate enough to seize the enemy by a leg, an arm, or even by the hair of his head, which the poor deluded people believe, without seeing what he grasps. Now the whole company rush towards the water, and the pater deposits the supposed devil on board the raft, on which the palongs row off with the greatest possible expedition, dragging the captive out to sea, to a considerable distance, when, having turned him and his vehicle adrift, they row back with the utmost speed to shore. For two days the enemy may survive this rough usage, and again land in safety, if driven on shore by the tide or wind, but on the third day he must die. Should he land at another village, he then does the mischief there, which he was prevented doing at the former place.

The worst consequence of such an unfortunate conclusion of the business is, that the greatest enmity immediately takes place between the two villages, and nothing can atone for the aggression, but a formal combat. The village invaded sends a challenge to the former, and a day is fixed for the battle. The captains of all the neighbouring villages having met to a consultation, the combatants are chosen, and as there are others who wish to take advantage of so just a mode of settling their disputes, they are summoned to



appear. One has stolen something, another run off with his neighbour's wife, and the like. All these people now meet, both the injured and the guilty, and each being provided with a sufficient supply of long sticks, of the Mango tree, they proceed to the place of rendezvous. There the captains examine the sticks, and those that are too thick are thrown away. This being done, two of the combatants step out, and lay about each other's back and head, till one of the party is obliged to give up. A second couple follow, and after them others, till in a proper space of time, the whole company has got a good drubbing. The most innocent among them are generally the worst handled; however, the business is now decided, and all are convinced, that whoever was first obliged to give up, was the offender. Peace is thus restored, both parties being perfectly satisfied with so wise and just a decision, nor could anything we said, convince them of the folly and wickedness of such superstitious and injurious practices.

## LETTER VII.

You wish to know what were the chief external causes of the failure of our exertions; and ask, whether our residence on the island had been with the consent of the natives, or whether they considered us as intruders. The latter circumstance was guarded against by a regular treaty made in December 1774, between the Brethren, and the captain and inhabitants of the village Malacca, near to which they had made their settlement. They then obtained legal possession of that piece of land, which they occupied. Such presents as the natives required, were delivered, and the terms contained in the treaty fully explained, to them; after which the principal men signed their names, by drawing a pen with ink over the letters, as written with a pencil. The neighbouring village likewise received a proper consideration for a treaty of friendship with them, and now the Brethren were looked upon no longer as *Kaleng*, "foreigners;" but as *Baju Tripjet*, "natives at Tripjet." Objections were however started, when they began to build their dwelling-house; and some wicked people endeavoured to raise suspicions in the



minds of their countrymen, as to the intentions of the Missionaries. The latter were, for some time after, in danger of their lives, from the fickle disposition of their new friends; but the Lord preserved them. Their upright intentions were at length acknowledged, and ever after all due respect and confidence shown to them by all the inhabitants of Nancauwery.

The failure of the Mission was owing to other causes, of which I will mention some, according to my view of the subject. First, the extreme difficulty of learning the language. We had indeed an opportunity of speaking with some of the natives, in a kind of bastard Portuguese, but it would by no means answer the purpose of preaching the gospel to them in general. It was their own native language, of which we wished to acquire a sufficient knowledge, thereby to gain access to the whole nation. To this end, a pater, called Philip, was engaged as language-master. A few of the Missionaries made some proficiency, notwithstanding the peculiar difficulties attending the study; for impediments arise even from the habits of the natives. Their language is in itself very poor in words and expressions, and they are of so indolent a turn, that even talking seems a trouble to them; and as long as they can express, by signs, what they mean, they are unwilling to

open their mouths. If a stranger comes into their houses, they sit still and look at him, or perhaps, pointing to some food, motion to him to sit down and eat. There he may sit for hours, without hearing a syllable spoken, unless he can himself begin, when they will answer with friendliness. Again, both men and women have always a huge quid of the betel, or areca-nut in their mouths, which renders their speech so indistinct, that if you ask them the names of the various objects before them, you can hardly distinguish between the sputtering sounds they make. Often were we obliged to tell pater Philip to take his quid out of his mouth, that we might hear what he attempted to articulate. As to books and vocabularies, we found none, nor could we make any, while our knowledge of the language was so imperfect.

Secondly, the unhealthiness of the climate; by which most of the Missionaries were carried off before they could learn the language, or just when they had got so far, that they were able to speak to the natives. During the comparatively short period of the existence of the Mission, eleven worthy Missionaries found their graves in Nancauwery, and thirteen more, shortly after their return to Tranquebar, in consequence of the malignant fevers and obstructions in the



liver, contracted in the island. These dreadful disorders, and the seasoning fevers, which every new-comer must suffer, are all accompanied with such pain in the head, dejection of spirits, and constant sickness, that the senses are in a degree stupified, and learning rendered doubly difficult. The mind being likewise filled with desponding views of the possibility of relief and of future usefulness, the effect is very unfavourable to that persevering diligence, with which such a barbarous language must be studied; and death snatching so soon those away, who had made some small progress, their successors must begin the uphill work again and again, and the prospect of obtaining the aim of the Mission is put off from one period to another.

Thirdly, our mode of life, and too great exertion in clearing and planting, and other laborious work, which necessity obliged us to undertake, was likewise a principal cause of the prevalence of various disorders and complaints of the liver, the region of the stomach swelling, and becoming quite hard below the ribs. All who were thus affected, died either in the island, or soon after their return to Tranquebar. I was not seized in this manner, but, besides other illnesses, got a quartan ague, of which I have not lost the symptoms to this day. When I mentioned it in a letter to

Dr. Betschler at Tranquebar, he wrote in answer: " Ah, my friend, if you have got the Nicobar ague, " it will keep you company all your life, if you " live to be an hundred years old." Thus far his words have proved true, and to this present time, after thirty years have elapsed, I perceive the remaining symptoms regularly returning every fourth night. While I was at Nancauwery, they were very violent, and weakened me so much, that I often thought my life in danger. After my return to Europe, they abated considerably; but on being appointed to the service of the Missions in the Danish West India islands, the heat of the climate caused them to increase in strength, though by degrees they again became bearable, and the fever almost imperceptible. At present the symptoms are various, sometimes a great degree of thirst, sleepless nights, and uneasy sensations; at other times heavy yet restless sleep, with dreams approaching to delirium; but whatever they are, never failing to recur every fourth night regularly. I will not venture to say, whether, if I had staid in Europe, the use of proper means, under skilful treatment, might not have entirely removed the complaint, but the fact, as it exists at present, has verified Dr. Betschler's prediction.

To return to the former subject, I must add,



that not one of us ever learnt the Nicobar language so perfectly as to be able clearly to explain the will of God concerning our salvation to the natives. But I am of opinion that they are not the most hopeless subjects, and think that the gospel might be preached to them with success, if the abovementioned obstacles were removed.

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### LETTER VIII.

THE birds-nests, which I have described in a former letter, brought a great number, both of Malays and Chinese to our coasts, in quest of them. These people always created much confusion and quarrelling among our otherwise peaceable islanders, by their knavery and frequent assassinations; and also gave the Missionaries a great deal of trouble. In general, fifteen or sixteen, and in one year, nineteen, large prows full of these vagabonds came to Nancauwery. After the officers and soldiers who had accompanied the Missionaries to this island were all dead, and it was known, that the latter would not quit their post, the government at Tranquebar required, that always one of them

should be appointed Danish Royal Resident, and hold, as it were, the presidency of the islands. The patent was always signed by the King. Brother Voelcker was the first who filled that station, and was succeeded by Brother Armedinger. He was followed by Brother Blaschke, and after his return to Tranquebar, I was appointed. As I thought it was left to my own option, whether I would accept of it or not, I declined it, in a letter to the Governor of Tranquebar, conceiving it to be inconsistent with the duties of a Missionary. However, I was obliged at length to yield, and became Resident. I was succeeded by Brother J. Heinrich, and Brother Soerensen was the last.

I will add an instance or two to show, how this office proved frequently a source of much vexation to us. The Danes, when they formed their first settlement in Kar Nicobar, an island 75 English miles in circumference, to which they gave the name of New Denmark, had conveyed a considerable number of cannon thither; but after the death of all the soldiers, the carriages rotted, and I saw seventeen of these guns lying on the ground. By one or more at a time, the Malays kept stealing them away. It happened, however, that a Nacata, or general of the King of Queda, as he styled himself, arrived at Nancauwery with a



large prow, and being informed by the natives, that he had no less than five of them on board, I thought it my duty, as Resident, to protest against this theft, and spoke to him about it. He flew into a great rage, and began to use threatening language, pleading the orders of his king. I answered, that his king very well knew, that as he had laid nothing down there, he had no right to take any thing up; and that if he persisted, I should give notice to the King of Denmark. I then left him, but heard, that he afterwards threatened soon to prevent my reporting his conduct; adding, that when I was dead, I should be quiet enough. The natives also assured me, that it was his intention to kill me, but that they would stay with me for my defence. I replied, that though I thanked them for their kindness, yet they, as well as we, were much too weak to withstand the diabolical influence which actuated these murderous people; every inclination to commit that and other crimes, being of the devil; but that our hope and trust was in God our Saviour, who was infinitely more powerful than the devil, and could and would protect us against all the designs of wicked men. We took that opportunity of speaking to them again of the love of our Saviour, and of His desire to deliver them

from the power of Satan, and grant them everlasting life. They heard us with attention and surprise, and staid with us till late at night, when we desired them to return home, but could hardly prevail upon them to leave us.

As soon as they were gone, having performed our usual evening devotions, we were preparing to retire to bed; when we heard a noise without, and immediately after, a violent knocking at the door. On opening it, I was not a little alarmed to see a great number of Malays surrounding the entrance. I cried silently to the Lord to protect us against their evil designs; but though my fears were great, I assumed an authoritative air, keeping my station in the door-way, as if determined not to let them enter. The foremost, however, pushed in, and now the Nacata himself came up. He treacherously held out his hand; but on my offering him mine, he grasped it firmly, and dragged me with him into the house. The Malays immediately filled all the chairs, and I stood before them. I had no other hope but in the mercy of God, to whom I sighed for help in this trying moment. Meanwhile more of them crowded into the room, and sat down on the floor, closely watching me, armed with their creeses or daggers. Though I preserved a firm and undaunted appearance, I



cannot describe my feelings, for I expected to be immediately sacrificed to their fury. The Nacata addressed me by saying, that he was come hither to ask, whose property the cannon were to be, his or mine? I answered, "that he came to the wrong person to make that inquiry; for I was only a servant of the King of Denmark, as he, according to his own account, was only the servant of the King of Queda. Neither of us, therefore, could determine who was to have the cannon. Our respective masters, and they only, were able to settle that point. He had told me that he had received orders to fetch them; and I could assure him, that I had orders to protest against it: we both, therefore, had only done our duty. All now depended upon this point, whether my king, or his king, had any right to give orders in these islands, and to claim the property in question." At this answer, he became quite furious, and began to talk about the ease, with which the Malays might murder us all. Some of them even drew their daggers, and shewed how they were tipped with poison. They looked, indeed, more like a host of devils, than a company of human creatures. On a sudden they all jumped up, and seemed to rush upon me. I commended my soul to the Lord, and called upon Him for deliverance,

awaiting the issue in silence, when, to my surprise, they quitted the room, one by one, and left me, standing alone, in astonishment at their conduct. I shall never forget the dreadful scene, and think of it at this moment, with shuddering. As soon as they were all gone, and I found myself in safety, I fell on my knees, and with tears, gave thanks to God my Saviour, who had heard my prayers, and rescued me out of the hands of these savages. My Brethren, who had very properly retired into the wood, when the Malays first burst into the house, now returned, and we wept for joy to see each other alive.

Having somewhat recovered from our fright, I went to the village, and told our old Nicobar captain, Jan, what had happened, upon which he sent messages to all the neighbouring villages, when in a short time, great numbers arrived, well armed, and watched at the landing-place all night. Had the Malays offered to return to shore, not one of them would have escaped with his life.

In the morning, the Nacata's prow, with two others, were seen at anchor under Tricut, many miles from hence. The people there told us afterwards, that the Nacata had said, that the Danish Resident at Nancauwery was a very great sorcerer, for he had tied their hands, and they



could do nothing with him. It was not I who tied their hands, but God, who heard the cries of a poor, defenceless and trembling child, trusting alone to His mercy and power.

I might add many other instances of the trouble and mischief occasioned by the visits of these robbers, and which it was my business to prevent, if possible; but will close my account, with relating only one more, to show in what manner they treat even their own countrymen; and also, how willing our neighbours were to defend our rights.

Having this year obtained, by foul or fair means, a pretty considerable booty, no less than nineteen prows, full of Malays, came, the ensuing season, into our roads, for birds-nests. I had, however, got the start of them. As soon as the north-east wind commenced, I went to the southern islands, where I staid a month, and not only collected a vast quantity of nests, but purchased all those which the natives brought for sale. The Malays, therefore, were disappointed, and got but few. We expected that they would have been thereby discouraged, and discontinued their visits. But we were mistaken. While I was at *Manjoul*, a small island, east of the channel of St. George, a prow with about sixty Malays arrived there, com-

manded by a Nacata, who called himself *Sayet Ismael*, a priest of the King of Queda. He was the most civil and well-behaved Malay I ever conversed with. I advised him therefore to stay where he was, to make a regular agreement with the natives about the price of the birds-nests, pay faithfully, and keep good order among his men, so as to prevent all cause of complaint; and assured him, that thus he would get a good cargo. He took my advice, and procured a considerable quantity of nests, while those, who followed him, got none.

Among the latter was a man who styled himself a Prince of Queda, and had two Nacatas, some women, and a numerous crew on board his large prow. He committed everywhere the grossest acts of barbarity, and in Kar Nicobar murdered two persons, of which I was soon informed. Shortly after, he came into our neighbourhood, and anchored under Tricut, where he seized upon Sayet Ismael's prow. The latter, having sent his palong to Nancawery, with eight sacks of rice, two of nests, and other goods, soon followed, claiming our protection. Thus, though we ourselves were in a defenceless state, the oppressed came and sought help from us. We suffered the priest to occupy one of our negroe-houses, where he re-



mained very quiet. Meanwhile the prince heard, that we had obtained a large quantity of nests, and thought it would be no difficult matter to plunder us likewise. For this purpose, he arrived with two large prows, filled with some of the most ferocious of the Malay race. They entered, occupied our house without any ceremony, and seemed to be a determined set of banditti. I was alone in the midst of them, and cried to the Lord to take me under his protection. While I was walking to and fro across the room, the prince inquired, whether I had any birds-nests. I replied in the affirmative; upon which he pretended, that he was come to purchase them of me, and wished to see them. As I happened, during this conversation, to step towards the door, one of our Caffre servants, who stood near it, thought I had made a sign to him, to call the natives to my assistance, though, in fact, I was so much agitated, that I had not even observed him. He ran immediately into the village Malacca, and called the people together. Meanwhile I spoke in a decisive tone with the prince, forgot all his grand titles, and assured him, that he should not get a single nest from me, sharply reproving him for having murdered two men at Kar Nicobar, who were under the protection of my sovereign. He flew into a

passion, saying, that he would soon shew me, that he had it in his power to sieze all my birds-nests ; and as to the two men, who had been stabbed at Kar Nicobar, he was not bound to answer for that deed to me.

He had scarcely finished this insulting speech, when a party of natives unexpectedly leaped in at the windows, with drawn sabres in their hands. The Malays, terrified beyond measure, asked, what all this meant. I replied: “ They  
 “ come to prevent your committing more mur-  
 “ ders.” In a short time, the house was surrounded by the natives, both men and women being armed with sabres, spears, and bludgeons, their number continually increasing. The prince and his men now began to beg, that we would take them under our protection. At first I gave them no answer, but continued reproving them for their base and treacherous practices, among which I particularly noticed their plundering people of their own nation. I asked: “ Who  
 “ therefore can trust to your word? You deserve  
 “ punishment at the hands of those you have so  
 “ often provoked by your injustice, and if I were  
 “ now only to lift up my hand, not a man of you  
 “ would escape.” Being convinced, that they were in my power, they began to entreat me to



interfere in their behalf, and the prince offered to restore all he had taken. "How can you," said I, "restore the lives of those you have murdered?" "However, you shall for once keep your word," and restore the prow you took from Sayet Ismael, with its whole lading." This he readily agreed to, and having called Sayet Ismael, I made the prince repeat his promise, and asked Sayet, whether he could trust him; which, after some words had passed between them in their own language, he assured me he could, and they shook hands, in token of sincerity. I now informed the prince, that his men might go unmolested to their palongs, but that he himself should stay with me, till Sayet Ismael's prow had been sent hither and delivered up to him. He was exceedingly terrified at this sentence, and said, that unless he was permitted to accompany his people, the natives would certainly kill him. At length, Sayet Ismael himself warmly interceding for him, I consented, that they should go away together, and went out to pacify the natives. It was with some difficulty that I succeeded in appeasing their indignation against these robbers, whom they now had in their power, but when I told them that I should look upon their compliance as a proof of their regard for me and my brethren, they were

satisfied, and made, of their own accord, a passage through their ranks, for the Malays. Their appearance was indeed formidable, as they stood on each side, armed with their spears and bludgeons. The Malays however were still afraid to leave the house, till, after much entreaty, I myself agreed to accompany them to their palongs. The prince seized my hand, and would not let me go, till he had got into the boat.

I thought it my duty to avail myself of this opportunity to impress these ferocious invaders of our islands, with some sense of the danger they were in, and to teach them, that they might not always be permitted to commit their depredations with impunity. For a time I believe it had a good effect: but I confess, that I felt not a little intimidated by this unpleasant visit, and much regretted the necessity of holding the office, and doing the duty of a Resident, or agent of government. God was my refuge, and had He not granted me presence of mind sufficient to avoid all show of the fear I felt, we should probably have fallen a sacrifice to the revengeful and murderous spirit of these barbarians.

Sayet Ismael returned to us that very night, with his recovered prow and cargo, thankful for the justice which he had obtained, and as he of-



ferred us his services, we intrusted him with a parcel of letters to our Brethren in Europe, which we found he had regularly forwarded, as they all came safe to hand.

The prince had talked of nothing on the way to Tricut, but of the wonderful power of the Missionaries, and declared, that he would certainly never again set foot on Nancawery.

You must, by this time, be quite tired of reading these fragments. I hope I have succeeded in giving you some idea of our situation in the Nicobar islands, and of the circumstances, by which our attempts to convert the natives to Christianity were frustrated. I bless the Lord my Saviour, for preserving me in the midst of all trouble and danger, and if I appear to you to have endured some sufferings in body and mind, in the East Indies, more especially by the total failure of our endeavours to gain souls for Christ from among the heathen, in the place to which we were sent, I call upon you now to praise the Lord with me, for the great mercies I have since experienced, in the West Indies, where I have beheld, with joy, the power of the word of His cross, in the conversion of hundreds and thousands of negroes, among whom I have had the favour to proclaim it. I still think of, and pray for, the poor ignorant in-

habitants of the East, and particularly of the Nicobar islands, and trust, that now the time will soon come, when, though some of Christ's servants have sowed in tears, others shall reap with joy. May the glory of His saving name be made manifest in all the earth, and the gospel be proclaimed in its most dark and distant parts, by the present extended circulation of the bible, and the exertions of His people of every denomination. With sincerest affection, I remain ever, &c. &c.

JOHN GOTTFRIED HAENSEL.

*To the* REV. C. I. LATROBE,  
*London.*

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W. McDowall, Printer, Pemberton Row,  
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